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AN INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL-TO-HOME COMMUNICATIONS
AMONG SELECTED SOUTH DAKOTA COMMUNITIES

BY
LARRY K. TENNYSON

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree, Master of Science, Major in
Journalism, South Dakota
State University

1969

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AN INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL-TO-HOME COMMUNICATIONS
AMONG SELECTED SOUTH DAKOTA COMMUNITIES

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Science, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

~~Thesis~~ Advisor

Date

head, Department of Journalism
and Mass Communication

Date

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LT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Objectives of the Study

"The demand for information about schools is increasing dramatically. War and cancer are the only subjects that claim greater public interest today," according to Leslie J. Stiles, professor of inter-disciplinary studies at Northwestern University.¹

This opinion is shared by others in the field of educational public information, some of whom question the topical-coverage allocation and the display given to educational news by the press and by school officials.²

The contrast between what parents want to know about schools and what is disseminated to them about schools has been described by researchers for nearly forty years.³ Yet, Stiles says, little progress is evident to show that persons responsible for school

1 L. J. Stiles, The Present State of Neglect, (Madison, Wisconsin: Project Public Information, November, 1967), p. 15.

2 Irving W. Stout and Grace Langdon, "What Parents Want to Know About Their Child's School," Nation's Schools, 60:45-48 (August, 1957).

3 Belmont Farley, "What to Tell the People About the Public Schools," Contributions to Education, No. 355, (1929); abstract: Teachers College Record, 32:471-73 (February, 1931).

information and news have heeded the findings and recommendations of these studies.⁴ Virtually all of this research has dealt with the metropolitan daily newspaper and the larger population center, two units not typical of South Dakota.

This state has 12 daily newspapers, but only one has a circulation which exceeds 50,000. Furthermore, six of the dailies have circulations of less than 8,000, and the average circulation of these six is slightly more than 3,500.⁵

Only seven per cent of the public-school superintendents of South Dakota work in schools situated in a community having a daily newspaper. Although a total of 18,535 students attend the public high schools of these 12 communities, a total of 31,624 students attend the public high schools in the South Dakota communities which have only weekly newspapers.⁶

Thus, those interested in school-to-home communications in South Dakota may well wonder if existing research reports have meaning in rural areas, and also may wonder what the pattern is for school-to-home communications in South Dakota. One might logically ask these

4 Stiles, p. 17.

5 South Dakota Newspaper Directory and Rate Book, (Brookings, South Dakota: South Dakota Press Service, Inc., 1969) pp. 3-4.

6 Educational Directory of South Dakota Schools, (Pierre, South Dakota: Department of Public Instruction, 1968-69) pp. 18-25.

questions: (1) Are the findings of studies in other areas applicable to South Dakota small towns? (2) Is the weekly newspaper in the small South Dakota community a potentially effective medium for school-to-home communications? (3) How are school-to-home communications patterns in South Dakota regarded by parents, weekly newspaper editors, school superintendents, and school newspaper advisers? (4) What is the nature of the demand for information; how does what is furnished compare with what is desired?

Review of the Literature

An accumulation of 86 sources of information pertaining to school-to-home communication was reviewed by the investigator. In addition to reference texts and articles in periodicals, materials were obtained from organizations such as the National School Public Relations Association, the Education Writers' Association, and Project Public Information. Other sources included the Dissemination Unit of the Division of Planning and Supplementary Centers (Title III, ESEA) of the U. S. Office of Education, two national conferences on the dissemination of educational information, consultation with staff members of South Dakota State University and the University of Wisconsin, and tape-recorded speeches by other eminent persons in the field.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, the literature cited will be limited to that which applies to school-to-home communications as indicated in the foregoing four questions.

Studies Relating to South Dakota

The results of Kermith Sheimo's 1962 study of educational news content among six South Dakota newspapers showed that only 5 per cent of all educational news made the front page of South Dakota daily newspapers.⁷ He found that those newspapers gave student activities 72 per cent of the space devoted to educational news; academic affairs received 16 per cent, and elementary schools received less than 7 per cent. Of the student-activity news, 84 per cent was for sports events. Less than 6 per cent of the educational news dealt with classes or academic courses.⁸

A 1969 study of school-innovation adoptions in South Dakota by Clinton Berndt, State Title III Evaluator for the Department of Public Instruction, found that 70 per cent of 296 schools surveyed had one organizational, curricular, or technological change during the 1968-1969 school year. Berndt also found that of a list of ten school innovations, only modular scheduling had been adopted by fewer than 20 schools. The use of teacher aides was reported in 103 schools. Included in this list were: modular and flexible scheduling, team

7 Kermith E. Sheimo, "The Coverage of Elementary and Secondary Education and Education-related Activities by South Dakota Daily Newspapers," Unpublished M. S. Thesis, South Dakota State University, December, 1962, p. 33.

8 Sheimo, p. 76.

teaching, non-graded classes, individualized instruction, departmentalized instruction, teacher aides, computer services, pupil progress reports, and instructional resource centers.⁹

In 1941, a South Dakota public-school superintendent, W. Marvin Kemp, reported a study in which he compared the school superintendents' and the newspaper publishers' accuracy in perceiving parents' educational news interests. Kemp said that editors do little about securing the educational news for daily and weekly newspapers, and he cited an Iowa study by Kluckhohn and Peterson which showed that two-thirds of all educational news items are furnished by superintendents. In a second study cited by Kemp, Rollo G. Reynolds determined that in 83 per cent of the school systems he sampled throughout the nation, the superintendents furnished the majority of the school news.¹⁰

Kemp then conducted a content analysis of newspaper editorials and found that 35 per cent of those on the topic of education were devoted to an appraisal of what is being taught, how it is being taught, and the results that are being obtained.

The conclusion Kemp felt was indicated by his findings was " . . . that school authorities are the central figures in the school publicity program, yet they, and not the editors are the ones who have

9 Clinton Berndt, "Innovations Adoptions in South Dakota Schools," Unpublished survey report prepared for the South Dakota Department of Public Instruction, March, 1969, pp. 1-4.

10 W. Marvin Kemp, "A Weakness in School Publicity," Nation's Schools, 28:30 (October, 1941).

failed to interest themselves in what the people would like to know about the schools."

"The plethora of athletic and extra-curricular new stories must be attributed to the school authorities' failure to release the type of information about the schools that the people want to read," Kemp added.¹¹

Research and Opinion on Parent Interests

Forty years ago Belmont Farley studied the school-information interests of 5,067 parents in 13 cities. Using 13 categories of school news, he found that parent preferences ranked as follows: (1) pupil progress and achievement, (2) methods of instruction, (3) health of pupils, (4) courses of study, (5) value of education, (6) discipline and behavior of students, (7) teachers and school officers, (8) attendance, (9) buildings and building program, (10) business management and finance, (11) board of education and administration, (12) parent-teacher association, (13) extra-curricular activities and sports.¹² Scott Cutlip and Allen Center asserted, "There's little reason to doubt its validity today," in discussing Farley's study in their book on public relations.¹³

¹¹ Kemp, p. 30.

¹² Farley, p. 472.

¹³ Allen H. Center and Scott M. Cutlip, Effective Public Relations, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), p. 375.

"The farther a school service apparently is removed from the actual teaching process and its relation to educational results with children, the lower the position accorded it," said Farley in referring to the amount of space devoted to topics of high interest to parents. He made this observation following his content analysis of the newspapers in the 13 cities.¹⁴

According to James L. Hymes, Jr., "Most of all, every parent wants to know: 'How is my youngster doing?' 'How does he stack up?' 'How is he behaving?' 'What do you think of him?' 'What do you think we ought to do next?'.¹⁵

Irving W. Stout and Grace Langdon included parents from South Dakota in the sample for a 1957 study of parent preferences for school information. Not one interview failed to elicit a desire to know about some specific phase of the curriculum, according to the two researchers, who added, "High on the list are the three 'R's'.¹⁶

Mentioned frequently in the interviews was a feeling of confusion about the newer ways of teaching, according to the authors.

14 Farley, p. 472.

15 James L. Hymes, Jr., "Parents Want to Know," NEA Journal, 43:279-80 (May, 1954).

16 Stout and Langdon, p. 47.

Nor was the comment always on the side of wanting to know what changes have taken place in the child's school. Frequently they said they would like to know why changes have not taken place and what they as parents could do to bring about those changes they regard as necessary to bring the school up to date.¹⁷

Implied in the parents' suggestions was the wish for open lines of communication.¹⁸

George Gallup conducted a national poll measuring parent opinion on organizational, technological, and curricular change in 1966. Included in the resulting magazine article was the percentage breakdown on the number of parents who said they had read or heard about the various school changes. "The large percentage of 'no answer' (42 per cent) might indicate a need of many school systems for a parent-information campaign," according to Gallup.

None of the following types of change received more than a six per cent response: (1) technological--teaching machines, films, visual aids, and television teaching; (2) organizational--team teaching; (3) curricular--sex education, changes in courses, FLES (foreign language methods), and new alphabet.¹⁹

17 Stout and Langdon, p. 48.

18 George Gallup, "Parents Are Ready," The Instructor, October 1966, p. 149.

19 Gallup, p. 149.

John H. Colburn, publisher of a Kansas newspaper, said, "While some parents may appear to be disinterested in revolutionary educational processes, they may in reality be simply baffled by changes beyond their comprehension."²⁰

Colburn said that the vast majority of parents are interested, but they do not want to show their ignorance by asking questions.

This is where the press can be extremely valuable as a communicator between the schools and the home--to explain new teaching techniques, to illustrate the use of language laboratories, to stress the new role of physics and chemistry, and to explain new mathematical concepts in an era of computer programming.²¹

Otis A. Crosby, assistant director of Information Services, Detroit Public Schools, contended that persons increasingly resist school news as their own children draw nearer to graduation. "The press has an obligation to explore the built-in resistance to schools," he said.²² However, while Crosby called for study of parent resistance, Everest P. Derthick and George J. Kienzle stated, "Researchers have done little to study the working relationship of the schools and the press."²³

²⁰ John H. Colburn, "The Responsibility of the Press," Theory Into Practice, 3:123 (October, 1964).

²¹ Colburn, p. 123.

²² Otis A. Crosby, "The Challenge of Better Public Relations," Theory Into Practice, 3:127 (October, 1964).

²³ Everest P. Derthick and George J. Kienzle, "The Mutual Responsibility of the Schools and the Press," Theory Into Practice, 3:119 (October, 1964).

As the Sheimo study indicated, newspaper coverage on curriculum topics didn't seem to rate its fair share of attention in the state's daily newspapers. Editor Jean Worth of the Escabana (Michigan) Daily Press made a statement regarding this subject:

I think that one of the reasons we do not see more really perceptive articles about education in lay journals is the indecision or doubt of editors about public interest. Much of what we read is "Why Johnny can't write, spell, parse, conjugate or make change." Is interest so lacking that a great mountain of educational achievement must be passed by for some sensational detraction?²⁴

Further evidence of the indecision or doubt editors may hold about the public interest was reported at the South Carolina Conference on Educational News Coverage, sponsored by the South Carolina Department of Public Instruction in 1967. Members of the Department found that 58 South Carolina editors ranked as below average importance such topics as unusual classroom learning activities and unusual in-service programs for improving teachers. Taking lowest ratings with the editors were stories explaining objectives in curriculum and career plans of graduating seniors. Ranked as most important were topics relating to building programs and large amounts of money, such as bond issues for new schools, budget proposals, or increasing teacher salaries.²⁵

²⁴ Jean Worth, "The Greatest Need Is for Public Understanding," Nation's Schools, 60:48 (August, 1957).

²⁵ Albert E. Holliday, "Money and Mortar," Project Public Information Monthly Report, 1:1 (April, 1967).

The most notable departure from indicated parent interests, according to Sheimo, Farley, and others, is the overabundance of sports news. William G. Monahan, associate professor of education at the University of Oklahoma, suggested several reasons for this condition. He noted that newspapers employ sports writers who naturally view the coverage of interscholastic sports events as an important part of their responsibilities; he also observed that the number and regularity of athletic contests throughout the year provides newspapers with a constant source of news for reader interest; and last, he said that the games are usually played on Friday, and because daily newspaper issues are usually "light" on news on Saturday, with much space available, this news is most welcome.²⁶

Monahan said, "If overemphasis on activities is harmful to public education then the schools themselves must shift emphasis to other aspects of the school program."²⁷

A study concerning assessment of educational news by superintendents was conducted by Roy E. Carter. He polled public-school superintendents in California and asked them to rank seven categories of school news in terms of the public's need for them and in terms of the public's interests in them. Carter then compared the rankings

²⁶ William G. Monahan, "Michigan School News in Michigan Newspapers," Theory Into Practice, 3:147-48 (October, 1964).

²⁷ Monahan, p. 148.

with a content analysis of educational news coverage. He derived this from the California newspapers situated in the communities of the superintendents he polled.²⁸

According to the results of Carter's study, superintendents felt the public was as interested as it should be in administration news--school finance, school plant, and board of education. Superintendents perceived the public as being less interested than it should be in topics including the educational program, student welfare, and teachers' activities. Superintendents saw the public as excessively interested in sports and student activities.²⁹

The kind of school news which most often gets into the papers (exclusive of sports) is regarded by school superintendents as of little interest to the public, according to Carter.³⁰

Studies Revealing Misunderstanding or Criticism

Harry L. Stearns cited five major areas of misunderstanding between the schools and newspapers in his book Community Relations and the Public Schools: (1) the closed-door policy, in which school personnel and the board are sensitive to criticism and shun what

28 Roy E. Carter, Jr., "The Press and Public School Superintendents," Journalism Quarterly, 31:175 (Spring, 1954).

29 Carter, p. 182-3.

30 Carter, p. 182.

they term "fish bowl" operations visible to the public, (2) suppressing unpleasant news, (3) off-the-record confidences used by school personnel in an attempt to squelch news, (4) by-passing the newspapers in releasing important news, and (5) premature release of the news. Stearns also said that newspapers are not in business to function as publicity agents for schools, and that to warrant coverage, superintendents must operate the kinds of schools which are newsworthy.³¹

Carter's study also dealt with areas of misunderstanding between the schools and the newspapers. Attitudes of superintendents in his sample were revealed by asking them to rank seven information channels according to the degree of importance they felt each had in keeping the public informed. Newspapers ranked high in importance but only about average in terms of the amount of confidence the superintendent felt the public had in them. "In other words," said Carter, "superintendents perceive newspapers as an essential communications channel, but they tend to doubt that the public believes in them as it does with face-to-face reports from school people or from student reports."³²

"Moreover, the school men believe that newspaper stories about education are often misleading because of incompleteness, and that

³¹ Harry L. Stearns, Community Relations and the Public Schools, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 266.

³² Carter, p. 183.

much socially significant news gets crowded out because it is not 'sensational' enough to please editors," said Carter.³³

Superintendents are sometimes self-critical as well. This was evident in remarks made by Floyd Christian, Florida Superintendent of Education, at a 1966 conference on educational public information held in California. Christian said educators possess a number of professional characteristics that handicap their effectiveness as communicators. He suggested that: (1) educators have a false impression about their abilities as communicators; (2) educators are not accustomed to competing for people's attention; (3) most educators have operated in obscurity for so many years that they are completely unprepared for the public's recent interest in their activities; (4) educators have such a high regard for their colleagues' professional ability that they unconsciously minimize the value of outside opinion; (5) most educators have little communications experience.³⁴

Carter stated that two principal criticisms were raised by newspapermen in a panel discussion on school-board coverage during the Fifteenth Annual Editors' Conference of the California Newspaper Publishers' Association. These were closed school-board meetings

33 Carter, p. 180-81.

34 Albert E. Holliday, "School PR Training Lack Attacked," Project Public Information Monthly Report, 1:1 (November, 1967).

and "united front" school-board meetings which seemed to be public airings of decisions reached in off-the-record board discussions held prior to the official board session.³⁵

G. K. Hodenfield, executive secretary of the Education Writers' Association, expressed his opinion that the blame for poor educational reporting must be shared equally by representatives of the school and the press: "All too often, there is a complete lack of understanding of what education is: Education is what happens when the teacher closes the classroom door and starts teaching, and that's where the news is." Hodenfield blamed school men for using complicated vocabulary and he cited a lack of desire on the part of editors for improving the educational writing skills of reporters assigned to public schools.³⁶

Stanley M. Elam, editor of Phi Delta Kappa publications, summarized the needs for communications-trained personnel when he said, "What we need are professional communicators who know education from the inside and professional educators who know communications from the inside."³⁷

35 Carter, p. 173.

36 G. K. Hodenfield, "A Point of View--The Superintendent and the Press," The School Administrator, (October, 1968), p. 11.

37 Holliday, p. 2.

Studies Relating to Small-town Newspapers and Editors

Dennis Sale studied the backgrounds of South Dakota weekly newspaper editors in 1962. He found that 132 of the editors had attended college, and that three of the editors possessed teaching degrees. When asked what magazines they read regularly and what books they had read during that year, the editors did not list educational titles. When asked what courses they would recommend for prospective weekly newspaper editors, they did not list education courses. More than half of the editors responding to the Sale questionnaire were in the bracket of from 30-to-40 years of age, although the study did not indicate how many were parents of school students.³⁸

Arthur B. Moehlman and James A. van Zwoll assessed the potential of the small-town newspaper in their book on school public relations:

The small town and rural press differs considerably from its large-city brother. It is the last stronghold of personal journalism. Its influence as a molder of public opinion is still fairly strong. Issued two or three times a week, as a weekly, or sometimes once in two weeks, it is much more directly dependent on circulation for revenue than the larger papers. Its advertising appeal is quite limited. Consequently this kind of newspaper carries a relatively large amount of news in relation to the advertising.

It caters heavily to the human desire for news about one's fellow men; hence it features as local news the personal items which in city papers are relegated to the society page.

38 Dennis Sale, "A Study of the Educational Backgrounds and Practical Journalistic Experiences of 107 South Dakota Weekly Newspaper Publishers," Unpublished M. S. thesis, South Dakota State University, June, 1962, pp. 47-49.

The small town newspaper editor is glad to reduce the amount of boiler plate news in order to accomodate local news with more immediate local interest value. This provides the schools serving the small town or rural area with a school public relations medium of high potential.³⁹

³⁹ Arthur B. Moehlman and James A. van Zwoll, School Public Relations, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1957) pp. 457-58.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Use of Questionnaires

The principal tool involved in conducting this study was a questionnaire designed to discover the attitudes of various groups concerning the problems of school-to-home communications.

The use of a questionnaire for social research has been challenged by several authorities on the basis of low response in contrast to the interview method which often yields 100 per cent return on a given sample. Furthermore, criticism has been voiced that persons who return questionnaires are not identical to those who do not, thus automatically biasing the returns.

"The greatest fear of researchers concerning low mail response is caused by the fact that experience shows that the percentage of replies varies by economic class. Lack of representativeness thus occurs which biases the findings," according to Mildred Parten.⁴⁰ Daniel Katz and Hadley Cantril said that high-income people respond with greater frequency to questionnaires--about 40 per cent, on the average.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Mildred Parten, Surveys, Polls and Samples, (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1950), p. 392.

⁴¹ Daniel Katz and Hadley Cantril, "Public Opinion Polls," Sociometry, 1:155-79 (1947).

Perhaps this should not be a serious concern where the sample itself is relatively homogeneous in terms of income, as would be the case among superintendents, most editors, and quite possibly among the parent groups.

"Returns of less than 40 or 50 per cent are common," said Fred N. Kerlinger. "Higher percentages are rare, at best, and the researcher must content himself with returns as low as 30 or 40 per cent," Kerlinger continued.⁴² Concurring with this point was Fred T. Schreier when he said, "The rate of returns is usually low--40 per cent of returns is considered a good rate."⁴³

While these citations in no way eliminated the basic weakness of data collection by questionnaire, the investigator felt they did combine with reasons of financial and time limitations of the study to justify somewhat the use of the questionnaire method.

Sampling

Six main groups of persons were selected by the investigator as being most closely involved in school-to-home communications: parents of elementary students, parents of high-school students,

42 Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research, (New York, N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), p. 397.

43 Fred T. Schreier, Modern Marketing Research, (Belmont, Calif.: 1963), p. 198.

parent-teacher association presidents, high-school newspaper advisers, school superintendents, and editors of weekly newspapers. The high-school principal and the superintendent were considered by the investigator to be the same person in many South Dakota small towns.

In sampling elementary-school parents, the investigator considered two methods: one was to attempt a random sampling of parents from many communities; the other was to survey all of the parents from a single elementary school. The latter method was chosen because it was believed a school could be found which was typical of South Dakota elementary schools and the problem of surveying would be made simpler and more economical. Also, the use of a single school would permit personal interviews as a check on questionable returns, and would insure a greater percentage of returns than would a state-wide survey. It was deemed impractical to attempt a random state-wide sampling.

South Dakota has 145 towns which have both a public school and a weekly newspaper. Of these, only 87 also have a school newspaper and a school-publication adviser.

These towns were chosen because the questions to be answered concern school-to-home communications via the weekly newspaper and the school newspaper.

Towns having only parochial schools were eliminated because the church injects dimensions into the school-to-home communications pattern which are not found in the public school.

Of the 87 communities with public schools, weekly newspapers, and high school newspaper advisers, the investigator selected Fort Pierre as the site of the high school for which the high-school-parent survey was conducted. The school and community compare with other South Dakota towns in the sample as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
FORT PIERRE CHARACTERISTICS COMPARED WITH THOSE OF SAMPLE

Characteristic	Average found in sample	Fort Pierre
High school enrollment	189	190
Number of high school teachers	13	13
Circulation of weekly newspaper	1,180	1,150

In addition, Fort Pierre is in the center of the state and combines both ranching and farming families among school patrons. The town has both a weekly newspaper and a departmental school newspaper.

Indications of the representativeness of the selected elementary school were determined by assuming that size of faculty is a good indicator of school size, facilities, and enrollment. A frequency distribution was conducted of all faculties among elementary schools in the 87 sample communities. It was found that in 48 of the communities

the faculty size of the elementary school tended to group between 5 and 13 teachers. The size of the faculty of the selected elementary school was 8--the midpoint of the interval mentioned above. It was also found that elementary faculty sizes were scattered from 14 to 87 with no similar interval grouping as mentioned above. Furthermore, the same characteristics of the high school--central South Dakota location, and both farming and ranching families among school patrons--apply to the elementary school.

Permission was secured from the school administrators to survey the 83 homes of patrons of the elementary school chosen by the investigator. Eliminated from the sample were parents who were employed by the school district or were employed as teachers or school administrators, those who had moved away from the community, and those who were employed by the local newspaper. These eliminations were made because the investigator felt the opinions of such persons could bias the sample. This left a total of 76 homes.

Parents included in the high-school survey were those whose children had recently finished the freshman year and would be sophomores the following September, and those whose children had recently finished the junior year and would be seniors the following September. In these types, the investigator felt he had obtained a general representation of high school parents in the community.

As he did with the group of elementary parents, the investigator eliminated parents who were employed by the school district or

the local newspaper, or who had moved away from the community. Of the 76 homes, 73 were included in the survey.

The third type of parent to be surveyed was the parent-teacher-association president. The investigator believed that this type of parent was in a position of greater involvement with school officials than other parents and could offer another dimension to the findings.

Parent-teacher-association presidents were from the 87 communities previously described.

Construction of the Questionnaire

General

In constructing the questionnaire, the investigator recognized the importance of seven factors said to help produce a high percentage of returns:

(1) the sponsorship of the questionnaire; (2) the attractiveness of the questionnaire format; (3) the length of the questionnaire; (4) the nature of the accompanying letter requesting cooperation; (5) the ease of filling out the questionnaire and mailing it back; (6) the inducements offered to reply; (7) the nature of the people to whom the questionnaire is sent.⁴⁴

Each questionnaire carried the name "Central Educational Planning Center" in the cover-letter heading to lend the prestige of its sponsorship.

44 Claire Selltitz, Marie Jahoda, Morton Deutsch, and Stuart W. Cook, Research Methods in Social Relations (Chicago, Ill.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 51-65.

A stamped, self-addressed envelope was included with each questionnaire. Copies of each questionnaire were included in the appendixes of this study.

Parent Questionnaire

Question (1) requested a rank-order rating of seven channels of school communication suggested by Carter's study.⁴⁵

Question (2) employed the original thirteen news categories used by Farley.⁴⁶ Parents were asked to rate them in terms of three levels of interest for purposes of group comparisons.

Question (3) asked for parents' ratings of the general interest level of school news when compared with other types of news. This was intended to produce an indicator of their predispositions for or resistances to school news.

Question (4) sought parents' assessment of the clarity of school news to elicit indications of the possible use of difficult vocabulary in school news which was mentioned by other researchers.

Question (5) asked for parent preferences in objectivity in school news, and question (6) asked if parents were obtaining the degree of objectivity they preferred.

45 Carter, p. 175.

46 Farley, p. 142.

Questions (7) and (11) sought to determine if parent interests had ever been sought by school officials or others.

Question (8) requested a judgment of value of four types of school news.

Question (9) asked for a judgment on the adequacy of news about curricular, organizational, or technological changes in the schools.

Question (10) sought an assessment of the quantity of school news.

The questionnaire ended with a request for demographic information.

Parent-teacher-association President Questionnaire

This instrument contained questions identical to those included in the parent survey, except in slightly different order.

School Superintendent Questionnaire

Questions (1) through (8), (12), (14), and (18) were intended to assess the superintendents' perceptions of parent interests and preferences.

Question (9) sought an assessment of school-press relations and rapport to indicate if this could be a factor in poor communications should they exist. Questions (10) through (13), (15), and (19) were included for the same purpose.

Question (17) was inspired by the "two-way" communications precept and sought to determine if indeed this was practiced.

School Newspaper Adviser Questionnaire

Questions (1) through (10), and (12) correlated with similar questions in the parent questionnaire as a check on advisers' perceptions of parent interests and preferences.

Questions (8), (9), (11), and (13) through (15) correlated with similar questions in the superintendent questionnaire for identical purposes.

Weekly Newspaper Editor Questionnaire

Question (1) related to school-press relations and rapport and also sought to determine the editors' main sources of school news.

Questions (4), (8), and (11) were included to determine the existence of a "closed-door policy" cited by Stearns.⁴⁷

Questions (3) through (6), (9), and (10) were similar to questions on the parent questionnaire and sought to assess the editors' perceptions of parent interests and preferences.

Timing

The period immediately following the close of the school year was chosen by the investigator as the time to conduct the survey.

⁴⁷ Stearns, p. 282.

The investigator realized that vacations of respondents posed a threat to the potential percentage of returns, but a state meeting of the school-administrators association one week following, and a possible dimming of respondents' perceptions of the problem weighed heavily against a later mailing, while the scheduling of graduations and other year-end school activities discouraged an earlier mailing.

A mailing earlier in the school year was avoided because the investigator wished to have the viewpoints of respondents with an entire school year to look upon for perspective.

Thus, the week of June 2-6 was set as the target date for mailing.

A follow-up post card was sent to each of the members of the sample and timed to arrive on Monday, June 16. Surveys were assembled for tabulations seven days later--June 23.

Tabulation

The Data Processing Division of South Dakota State University was contacted by the investigator and an arrangement effected for the collection data to be placed on IBM key-punch cards for machine tabulation and possible later cross-tabulations.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Response to the Survey

The percentage of returns by respondents was 45. Table 2 carries a breakdown of returns by groups.

TABLE 2
GROUPS SURVEYED AND RESPONSE TOTALS

Group Surveyed	Number Surveyed	Number Responding	Per cent Responding
Elementary parents	76	37	48.7
High school parents	73	24	32.9
PTA presidents	87	23	26.4
School superintendents	87	52	59.8
School newspaper advisers	87	41	47.2
Weekly newspaper publishers	87	34	39.1
Totals	497	211	42.4

Findings

All the groups tended to agree on the importance of pupil progress and achievement as a topic for school news and information. Superintendents, newspaper editors, and school newspaper advisers perceived extra-curricular activities to be first choice of parents, and pupil progress and achievement to be second or third choice. Parents tended to rank extra-curricular activities as average in interest. Table 3 carries the rankings of all types of news included in the questionnaire.

Methods of instruction was ranked higher in importance by parents than by superintendents, editors, or advisers. Parents tended to rate this category similarly to the Farley-study rating.

None of the groups agreed strongly with Farley's sampled parents on the interest of health of pupils, although closer agreement was evident in their ratings on the value of education news topic.

Discipline and behavior of students was rated higher as a news topic by parents than in the Farley study. Only editors and advisers tended to agree with the ratings in Farley's study on that topic.

The advisers and elementary parents agreed closely with the Farley ratings on the interest of the topic, buildings and building program, but all other groups tended to disagree with the Farley ratings.

Parents of high-school students ranked the interest of the news topic, attendance, higher than did all other groups. Elementary parents

TABLE 3

RATINGS BY SOUTH DAKOTA PERSONS SURVEYED COMPARED WITH
RATINGS BY URBAN PARENTS SURVEYED BY FARLEY

Topic	Farley Ratings	Ratings by respondents in the present survey					
		Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Group F
Pupil progress and achievement	1	1	1	1	3	2	2
Methods of instruction	2	3.5	2.5	4	9	10	11
Health of pupils	3	7	10	11.5	8	12	9.5
Courses of study	4	2	5	5.5	6	7	4
Values of education	5	6	4	3	7	8	4
Discipline and behavior of students	6	3.5	2.5	2	2	6	6.5
Teachers and school officers	7	9.5	11	10	10	9	9.5
Attendance	8	13	8	13	11	11	12
Buildings and building program	9	8	13	11.5	12	4	8
Business management and finance	10	11	7	9	4	5	6.5
Board of education and administration	11	9.5	9	5.5	5	3	4
Parent-teacher association	12	12	12	7.5	13	13	13
Extra-curricular activities	13	5	6	7.5	1	1	1

- Note: a. Group A is elementary parents, Group B is secondary parents, Group C is PTA presidents, Group D is school superintendents, Group E is weekly newspaper publishers, and Group F is high school newspaper advisers.
- b. Ratings were computed through the ranking of coefficients obtained by assigning the numerical values of "1", "2", and "3" to "least", "average", and "most", multiplying the appropriate values by the number of responses in each category, and adding the results for each type of news listed in the table.

and PTA presidents rated the interest of this topic as the lowest of the 13 categories. Superintendents, advisers, and editors perceived the interest of the topic to parents to be about the same as the rating given by the latter two parent-types.

Elementary and high-school parents tended to rank the topic, business management and finance, of low interest as did parents in Farley's study. Other groups of persons perceived the interest to be higher by four-to-six positions.

Similarly, elementary and secondary parents tended to see little interest in board of education and administration news, whereas all other groups perceived this topic as being of much higher interest.

The news on parent-teacher associations was seen as being of low interest by all groups except the presidents of these organizations.

Elementary parents and high school parents tended to agree with Farley's results except on the topic, extra-curricular activities. Farley's study indicated that parents rank this topic lowest, while parents in the investigator's study ranked the topic slightly above average in importance. Editors, superintendents and advisers perceived it as being of greatest importance to parents.

A series of rank-order correlation tables was prepared by the investigator to give some indication of the agreements and disagreements of the group with Farley and with one another. Definitions of terms used and other information regarding the tables follows in Table 4.

TABLE 4

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN CORRELATION TABLES

All disseminators -	All disseminators includes weekly newspaper editors, school newspaper advisers, and school superintendents.
All parents -	All parents includes elementary and high school parents as well as PTA presidents.
d -	Rank differences per news category for the two populations being compared in the table.
Entire sample -	Entire sample refers to all respondents--elementary and high school parents, PTA presidents, editors, superintendents, and high school newspaper advisers.
News category -	Each number refers to the type of news receiving that particular rating in the Farley study.
Ranking -	Ranking was established through the use of computed rank-values.
Rank value -	Rank value for each news category was computed by assigning values of 1, 2, and 3 to "least", "average", and "most" interest ratings by each respondent. The number of responses were thus totalled to arrive at rank value. Rank value is not repeated after it has once appeared in a table.
Significance level -	Significance level was derived by comparing the correlation coefficient to those indicated in Table III of Henry Garrett's <u>Elementary Statistics</u> , using 11 degrees of freedom ($N - 2$).

Table 5 indicated that South Dakotans included in the sample did not compare favorably with the urban parents included in Farley's study in their rankings of school news categories. The correlation coefficient between the rankings of the two groups was .35, which was considered as only slight correlation. The correlation was not significant at the .05 level of confidence.

The greatest difference in ranking was noted in the topic, extra-curricular activities, which received highest ratings by South Dakotans included in the sample, and lowest ratings by urban parents in Farley's sample. Wide variation was also noted with regard to methods of instruction, health of pupils, and business management and finance.

Table 6 indicated that all parents tended to agree more strongly with the Farley ratings than did all South Dakotans as a group. In the former case the correlation coefficient was .35, in the latter it was .57, which was significant at the .05 level of confidence. The ranking was close between the two groups on seven of the 13 categories of school news.

A third comparison of rankings was made between the parents in Farley's sample and the superintendents sampled in the investigator's study. Table 7 showed a correlation that was positive, but so slight as to be almost negligible. Influencing the correlation coefficient to a great degree were wide variances on the ratings of extra-curricular activities, board of education and administration, and methods of instruction. The correlation was not significant at the .05 level of confidence.

TABLE 5

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: ENTIRE SAMPLE'S RANKINGS COMPARED
WITH FARLEY SAMPLE'S RANKINGS

News Category = Farley rankings	Entire Samples' Rank-value	Entire Samples' Ranking	d	d ²
1	546	2	1	1
2	458	7	5	25
3	416	8	5	25
4	486	4.5	0.5	0.25
5	486	4.5	0.5	0.25
6	508	3	3	9
7	415	9	2	4
8	384	11	3	9
9	408	10	1	1
10	463	6	4	16
11	340	12.5	1.5	2.25
12	340	12.5	0.5	0.24
13	760	1	12	144

Sum of d² = 237

Correlation coefficient = .35

Significance = not significant at .05 level

Level of relation = present but slight

TABLE 6

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: ALL PARENTS' RANKINGS COMPARED
WITH FARLEY SAMPLE'S RANKINGS

News Category = Farley ranking	All Parents' Rank-value	All Parents' Ranking	d	d ²
1	236	1	0	0
2	219	3.5	1.5	2.25
3	176	9	6	36
4	219	3.5	0.5	0.25
5	203	5	0	0
6	222	2	4	16
7	172	10	3	9
8	155	13	5	25
9	163	11	2	4
10	178	8	2	4
11	183	7	4	16
12	162	12	0	0
13	199	6	7	49

Sum of d² = 161.5

Correlation coefficient = .57

Significance = significant at .05 level

Level of relation = marked

TABLE 7

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: PUBLIC-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' RANKINGS
COMPARED WITH FARLEY'S SAMPLE'S RANKINGS

News Category = Farley Ranking	Superintendents ' Rank-value	Superintendents ' Ranking	d	d ²
1	128	3	2	4
2	102	8	6	36
3	105	7	4	16
4	110	5	1	1
5	109	6	1	1
6	129	2	4	16
7	99	9	2	4
8	96	10.5	2.5	6.25
9	86	12	3	9
10	96	10.5	0.5	0.25
11	112	4	7	49
12	68	13	1	1
13	152	1	12	144

Sum of $d^2 = 287.50$

Correlation coefficient = .21

Significance = not significant at the .05 level

Level of relation = present but slight

Rank-order correlation was again used to compare the rankings of the school-news categories by superintendents and school newspaper advisers. The correlation indicated that the two groups tended to agree sufficiently to produce a coefficient of .79, which was considered high. The correlation was significant at the .01 level of confidence. No news-category ranking varied more than 4.5 levels from one group to the other. Table 8 carries information on variances in ranking found in other news-categories.

Superintendents' perceptions of parents' interests for school news also correlated highly with those of the third group of disseminators--the weekly newspaper editors--although not as highly as with those of advisers. A major variance of ranking on the topic, buildings and building program, may have contributed to the somewhat lesser correlation coefficient of .62 as shown in Table 9. This correlation was significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Editors' rankings of school-news categories compare as favorably with those of all the other participants in the study as a group as they do with those of the superintendents. The identical correlation-coefficient of .62 is shown on Table 10. The editor-group's rankings were pronounced in their variance from those of the other sample groups on the topic, buildings and building program, with the editors again ranking the topic more favorably with regard to interest.

TABLE 8

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: PUBLIC-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' RANKINGS
COMPARED WITH SCHOOL-NEWSPAPER ADVISERS' RANKINGS

News Category	Superintendents ' Ranking	Advisers ' Rank-value	Advisers ' Ranking	d	d ²
1	3	94	2	1	1
2	8	69	11	3	9
3	7	75	9.5	2.5	6.25
4	5	83	4	1	1
5	6	83	4	2	4
6	2	82	6.5	4.5	20.25
7	9	75	9.5	.5	0.25
8	10.5	68	12	1.5	2.25
9	12	78	8	4	16
10	10.5	82	6.5	4	16
11	4	83	4	0	0
12	13	52	13	0	0
13	1	117	1	0	0

Sum of d² = 76

Correlation coefficient = .79

Significance = significant at the .01 level

Level of relation = high

TABLE 9

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: WEEKLY NEWSPAPER EDITORS' RANKINGS
COMPARED WITH PUBLIC-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' RANKINGS

News Category	Editors ' Ranking	Editors ' Rank-value	Superintendents ' Ranking	d	d ²
1	2	88	3	1	1
2	10	68	8	2	4
3	12	60	7	5	25
4	7	74	5	2	4
5	8	71	6	2	4
6	6	75	2	4	16
7	9	69	9	0	0
8	11	65	10.5	0.5	0.25
9	4	81	12	8	64
10	5	79	10.5	4.5	20.25
11	3	85	4	1	1
12	13	58	13	0	0
13	1	97	1	0	0

Sum of d² = 139.5

Correlation coefficient = .62

Significance = significant at .05 level

Level of relation = marked

TABLE 10

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: WEEKLY NEWSPAPER EDITORS' RANKINGS
COMPARED WITH THOSE OF ALL OTHER GROUPS SAMPLED

News Category	All others' Rank-value	All others' Ranking	Editors' Ranking	d	d ²
1	458	2	2	0	0
2	390	6	10	4	16
3	356	9.5	12	2.5	6.25
4	412	4	7	3	9
5	395	5	8	3	9
6	433	3	6	3	9
7	356	9.5	9	0.5	0.25
8	319	12	11	1	1
9	327	11	4	7	49
10	373	8	5	3	9
11	378	7	3	4	16
12	282	13	13	0	0
13	468	1	1	0	0

Sum of $d^2 = 124.5$

Correlation coefficient = .62

Significance = significant at the .05 level

Level of relation = marked

Editors' rankings of the news categories compared less favorably with those of the parents than with the group to which they were compared in Table 11. Although the level of relation was substantial, the correlation coefficient of .47 indicated that the relation was not significant at the .05 level of confidence. However, close agreement was noted on the topics: parent-teacher association, attendance, teachers and school officers, and pupil progress and achievement.

Superintendents' perceptions of parent interests correlated much higher with the group of parents in Table 12 than did perceptions of editors in Table 11. In only two cases did the superintendents' ratings vary more than three ranks from those of the parents: these were in regard to the topics: methods of instruction and extra-curricular activities. The correlation (.79 coefficient) was significant at the .01 level of confidence.

Advisers' perceptions of parent interests for school news achieved a high correlation with those of the parents sampled. Major variances were noted in only three categories of news: methods of instruction, extra-curricular activities, and discipline and behavior of students. The greatest variance was noted with regard to the topic, methods of instruction, which the advisers tended to rate 7.5 positions lower than did the parents. The high level of relation (.72 coefficient) is significant at the .01 level of confidence as shown on Table 13.

TABLE 11

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: ALL PARENTS' RANKINGS COMPARED WITH
WEEKLY NEWSPAPER EDITORS' RANKINGS

News Category	Editors' Ranking	Parents' Ranking	d	d ²
1	2	1	1	1
2	10	3.5	6.5	42.25
3	12	9	3	9
4	7	3.5	3.5	12.25
5	8	5	3	9
6	6	2	4	16
7	9	10	1	1
8	11	13	2	4
9	4	11	7	49
10	5	8	3	9
11	3	7	4	16
12	13	12	1	1
13	1	6	5	25

Sum of d² = 194.5

Correlation coefficient = .47

Significance = not significant at .05 level

Level of relation = substantial

TABLE 12

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: ALL PARENTS' RANKINGS COMPARED WITH
PUBLIC-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' RANKINGS

News Category	Parents' Ranking	Superintendents' Ranking	d	d ²
1	1	3	2	4
2	3.5	8	4.5	20.25
3	9	7	2	4
4	3.5	5	1.5	2.25
5	5	6	1	1
6	2	2	0	0
7	10	9	1	1
8	13	10.5	2.5	6.25
9	11	12	1	1
10	8	10.5	1.5	2.25
11	7	4	3	9
12	12	13	1	1
13	6	1	5	25

Sum of d² = 79

Correlation coefficient = .79

Significance = significant at .01 level

Level of relation = high

TABLE 13

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: ALL PARENTS' RANKINGS COMPARED WITH
SCHOOL-NEWSPAPER ADVISERS' RANKINGS

News Category	Advisers' Ranking	All Parents' Ranking	d	d ²
1	2	1	1	1
2	11	3.5	7.5	56.25
3	9.5	9	0.5	0.25
4	4	3.5	0.5	0.25
5	4	5	1	1
6	6.5	2	4.5	20.25
7	9.5	10	0.5	0.25
8	12	13	1	1
9	8	11	3	9
10	6.5	8	1.5	2.25
11	4	7	3	9
12	13	12	1	1
13	1	6	5	25

Sum of d² = 101.75

Correlation coefficient = .72

Significance = significant at the .01 level

Level of relation = high

To provide indications of possibly low relation among the rankings of the three parent groups, the investigator tabled data in which elementary and high-school parents' rankings were compared with those of the PTA presidents. A high correlation (.74) was found; this was significant at the .01 level of confidence. Major variance of rankings was noted in only two categories: health of pupils--which PTA presidents tended to rank much lower in interest, and parent-teacher association--which PTA presidents tended to rank much higher. See Table 14.

A final table (Table 15) was constructed by the investigator to get indications of any correlation between the school-news interests of all parents sampled, taken as a group, and the perceptions of those interests held by all groups of disseminators assembled. The table indicated a correlation existed and that it was significant at the .05 level of confidence. Major variation in ranking was noted in only two categories of school news: extra-curricular activities and methods of instruction. The disseminators as a group tended to rate the former category four ranks higher in interest, and the latter category nearly eight categories lower in interest.

TABLE 14

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: COMBINED ELEMENTARY AND HIGH-SCHOOL
PARENTS' RANKINGS COMPARED WITH PTA PRESIDENTS' RANKINGS

News Category	Elementary/ High school Parents' Rank-value	PTA Presidents' Rank-value	Elementary/ High school Parents' Ranking	PTA Presidents' Ranking	d	d ²
1	165	61	1	1	0	0
2	162	57	3.5	4	0.5	0.25
3	129	47	7	11.5	4.5	20.25
4	164	55	2	5.5	3.5	12.25
5	144	59	6	3	3	9
6	162	60	3.5	2	1.5	2.25
7	123	49	10	10	0	0
8	115	40	12	13	1	1
9	116	47	11	11.5	0.5	0.25
10	127	51	9	9	0	0
11	128	55	8	5.5	3.5	12.25
12	109	53	13	7.5	5.5	30.25
13	146	53	5	7.5	2.5	6.25

Sum of $d^2 = 93$

Correlation coefficient = .74

Significance = significant at the .01 level

Level of relation = high

TABLE 15

RANK-ORDER CORRELATION: ALL PARENTS' RANKINGS COMPARED WITH
ALL DISSEMINATORS' RANKINGS

News Category	Parents ' Ranking	Disseminators ' Rank-value	Disseminators ' Ranking	d	d ²
1	1	310	2	1	1
2	3.5	239	11	7.5	56.25
3	9	240	10	1	1
4	3.5	267	6	2.5	6.25
5	5	263	7	2	4
6	2	286	3	1	1
7	10	243	9	1	1
8	13	229	12	1	1
9	11	245	8	3	9
10	8	274	5	3	9
11	7	280	4	3	9
12	12	178	13	1	1
13	6	366	1	5	25

Sum of $d^2 = 124.5$

Correlation coefficient = .62

Significance = significant at the .05 level

Level of relation = marked

Superintendents and advisers were asked to state whether news of teaching, learning, and pupil progress, administration, finance, and personnel, or student activities and sports would be most valuable to parents. About 75 per cent of the superintendents chose teaching, learning, and pupil progress. About 85 per cent of the advisers chose the same topic.

However, in responding to the same question, more than 92 per cent of the parents chose teaching, learning, and pupil progress as most important.

Each of the three groups of parents tended to agree that educational news was of average interest when compared to all other types of news.

In terms of the clarity of educational news, 68 per cent of the elementary parents said it was good or very good. Superintendents tended to agree with parents' assessment of educational news clarity, and school newspaper advisers, high school parents, and PTA presidents ranked the clarity lower than did the other groups of respondents. Clarity of educational news received its lowest ranking from high school parents.

In stating their preferences for objectivity in educational news reporting, all of the groups surveyed said they preferred objectivity, but only 27 per cent of them said they were getting this quality in the school news they were receiving. Superintendents (57 per cent) said they preferred objectivity in school news; when

asked if their schools were disseminating objective news, their affirmative response was 43 per cent.

A disagreement was noted by the investigator among the three types of news disseminators polled on their estimation of how closely parents' interest for educational news paralleled those of the general public. Of the editors, 38 per cent ranked parents to be close; only 8 per cent of the superintendents ranked parents close, and only 10 per cent of the advisers did so. Of the editors, only 3 per cent thought parents were different from the general public in their interests for educational news, whereas 23 per cent of the superintendents ranked parents different, and 22 per cent of the advisers did so.

A second disagreement was noted regarding the disseminators' perceptions of parent interests for information on school curriculum and organizational innovations. The advisers' response, when asked what demand parents voiced for this type of information, totalled 85 per cent in the none and slight categories. The superintendents response totalled 81 per cent in these categories. Only 9 per cent of the editors' response indicated there was no demand for such information, and 44 per cent of their response to a query on the adequacy of the sources for such information indicated not adequate. The elementary parents, the high school parents, and the parent-teacher presidents in about half of their responses said they thought the sources of information on school innovations were rarely adequate or never adequate.

The three parent-groups were also asked if the quantity of general school news and information was adequate. Whereas about 75 per cent of the parents gave rarely adequate or never adequate as a response, 39 per cent of the parent-teacher-association presidents gave rarely adequate or never adequate as a response.

Editors were asked if the quantity of school news provided by their sources was adequate. About 38 per cent said it was not. Furthermore, 38 per cent said infrequently or never to the question asking if the school encouraged the reporting of educational news.

Superintendents were asked if the local newspaperman seeks out the news of their schools. Nearly 70 per cent said seldom, never, or sometimes. However, nearly 70 per cent of the editors said good, very good, or excellent to a question asking how the school compared as a source of news.

The majority of the advisers and superintendents (68 and 73 per cent, respectively) indicated that newspapers print 90 per cent or more of the news the schools submit, and 79 per cent of the editors concurred.

Superintendents and editors were asked what portion of the school news is written by themselves, teachers, or students. About 65 per cent of the superintendents said that school personnel wrote more than 90 per cent of the school news, and 82 per cent of the editors said school personnel wrote about 50 per cent of the school news.

Several editors said they would like to have more news written by non-weekly-newspaper sources. When asked what the ideal portion should be, the editors said about 53 per cent.

Editors and superintendents both seemed content to leave the portion of school news written by students as it was. A small percentage of the editors' response suggested an increase in teacher-written news, and school superintendents' response of a similar percentage suggested the same increase for teachers. Neither the superintendents nor the editors suggested they wished more writing activity from any other sources.

Editors were given an opportunity to criticize the news submitted to them by educators. The largest percentages of the response in the great fault category went to: frequently submitted past or very near to newspaper deadline (47 per cent), seldom accompanied by a suitable photograph (38 per cent), poor style . . . doesn't follow inverted pyramid (26 per cent), and is on only the "safe" and non-controversial topics (24 per cent).

Listed in the minor fault category were: difficult language and lengthy sentences, poor leads, too lengthy to fit available space, and requires too much editing.

Listed among the faults rarely found were: not localized (71 per cent), does not meet the interests of general readers (62 per cent), biased and does not present a true picture (59 per cent), does not meet the interests of parent readers (56 per cent), has little impact on the reader (50 per cent), and not timely (47 per cent).

The implications were that few editors found major faults with the news written and submitted by educators.

Relating to the editors' criticism that educators seldom submit suitable photographs was the response superintendents gave to the question asking if they regularly do submit such photographs. The response was 75 per cent yes, and 25 per cent no.

Advisers and superintendents were given an opportunity to assess the rapport and relationship between their local newspapers and schools. Advisers (78 per cent) and superintendents (87 per cent) tended to rate rapport and relationship as excellent, very good, or good. Nearly 20 per cent of the advisers regarded the relationship as strained, yet only 11 per cent of the superintendents regarded it as so. In a second question asking for an assessment of the backing and support for education by newspapers, superintendents and advisers indicated poor in only 15 per cent of their responses.

The local weekly newspaper ranked as first preference among channels of communications by advisers, superintendents, and parent-teacher-association presidents. See Table 16. But elementary and secondary parents disagreed with them by indicating notices sent home with the child as their preferred communication channel. Superintendents indicated a greater use of notices sent home with the child than their low preference rating would imply. See Table 17. The least-used media by superintendents was radio, television, and pamphlets. In addition to the great amount of use to which superintendents put

TABLE 16

PREFERENCES OF PRINCIPAL GROUPS FOR CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Communications Channels	Elementary Parents' Rankings	High school Parents' Rankings	PTA Presidents' Rankings	School Advisers' Rankings	School Superintendents' Rankings
Local newspaper	4	4	1	1	1
PTA meetings	5	7	7	4	7
Television	7	6	5	7	6
Radio	6	5	6	6	3.5
Parent-teacher conferences	2	2	3	3	2
Notices sent home with child	1	1	2	2	5
Pamphlets	3	3	4	5	3.5

Note: Ranking was obtained by multiplying the number of responses for each category by the preference number. Products were then put in inverse rank-order and numbered from 1 to 7.

TABLE 17

MAJOR PER CENTS^a OF USE OF COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS
BY PUBLIC-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Communication Channel	Use Rank ^b	Most Used By:	Somewhat Used By:	Least Used By:
Local newspaper	1	73%	19%	8%
Student newspaper	2	46%	46%	8%
Notices sent home with child	3	40%	52%	8%
Letters	4	12%	52%	40%
Meetings	5	8%	48%	44%
Radio	6	15%	29%	56%
Pamphlets	7	6%	23%	71%
Television	8	6%	19%	75%
Miscellaneous	9	2%	4%	94%

Note: a. Per cents are based on 52 responses.

b. Ranking was obtained by multiplying the number of responses in each category by the preference number. Products were then put in inverse rank-order and numbered from 1 to 9.

the local paper, they often seem to employ the student newspaper as a communications channel.

When asked if they had ever been polled or consulted on a school problem, 90 per cent of the advisers responded no, 77 per cent of the superintendents responded no or don't recall, and about 65 per cent of the three parent-groups said no. Furthermore, 68 per cent of the elementary parents, 75 per cent of the high school parents, and 48 per cent of the parent-teacher-association presidents indicated they had never requested specific kinds of school information, or more information, from school officials. Superintendents and advisers indicated that in fewer than 12 per cent of their communities did parents make such requests frequently, whereas 15 per cent of the editors said that parents made such requests frequently.

When asked what kind of help would be beneficial to their school information programs, 62 per cent of the superintendents listed workshops and conferences as a great need, and 54 per cent listed specially qualified staff members to assume the responsibility for the information program as a great need. Graduate work in communications ranked third with the respondents. Research and evaluation to assess needs and consultants to assist the superintendent with information problems were cited as a moderate need by 65 per cent. Conferences and workshops which could prepare the specially qualified superintendents seemed to be their greatest preference for assistance. See Table 18.

TABLE 18

ADVISERS' AND SUPERINTENDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR TYPES OF
ASSISTANCE IN COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Type of assistance	Need perceived by advisers	Need perceived by superintendents
	moderate & great per cent	moderate & great per cent
Specially qualified staff	80	79
PR workshops	80	92
Consultants	66	72
Research of needs	66	79
Graduate communications work	57	77

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of the study were stated in the form of four questions:

- (1) Are the findings of studies in other areas applicable to South Dakota small towns?
- (2) Is the weekly newspaper in the small South Dakota community a potentially effective medium for school-to-home communications?
- (3) How are school-to-home communications patterns in South Dakota regarded by parents, weekly newspaper editors, school superintendents, and school-newspaper advisers?
- (4) What is the nature of the demand for information and how does what is furnished compare with what is desired?

Although Cutlip and Center assured readers of their textbook on public relations that the findings of Farley's 40-year-old study on parent preferences were still valid, the investigator noted that the correlation between those findings and the rankings given by his sample parents was not significant at the .01 level of confidence. Because of that fact and because of wide differences noted in several categories of school news, the investigator rejected the belief that Farley's findings were entirely pertinent.

Furthermore, the investigator noted the striking variation on rankings of extra-curricular activities between the two studies, and

that fact seemed to indicate that urban parents are less involved in certain facets of school life than are rural parents. This fact lends credence to the investigator's conclusion that such basic differences in population bias such studies as Farley's in favor of urban parents.

The investigator also recognized that strong correlation existed between Farley's parents and the South Dakota sample parents in their high preferences for school news and information related to teaching, learning, or pupil progress. However, this similarity was not judged sufficient to remove the indicated bias of cities-centered school research.

Editors' attitudes toward education were found to be rather favorable; however, sufficient discrepancies existed in the correlations between parent preferences and editor perceptions of parent preferences to indicate that rural, weekly newspaper editors may misunderstand the interests of parents for school news. Weekly newspaper editors had some perception of parent interests, although it was not significant at the .05 level of confidence. Despite this, the investigator did not find sufficient evidence to reject weekly newspapers as potentially effective channels of communication for school news. Further, the investigator noted that the preferences for the weekly newspaper as a communications channel were strong among other disseminators of school news, and this motivational circumstance could not be discounted.

In most of the topics of school news, advisers and superintendents showed good perception of parent interests--with correlations significant at the high .01 level. However, parents indicated a greater preference for personal communications than mass communications--possibly school officials may not recognize this demand or may not have time to comply with this preference. A further conclusion was that school information disseminators tend to use favorite means of communication rather than diversifying their efforts into other media such as radio, television, and annual reports. However, the investigator noted evidence of a fairly pronounced dissatisfaction with present school communications patterns and practices among all the populations he explored, and he interpreted this to represent a healthy attitude toward school communications improvement in rural South Dakota.

The findings of the investigator indicated that parent demands for school news are not being satisfied with the school news presently being furnished. The nature of the demand seemed clearly delineated--more news is desired on topics most central to the educational process, and less is desired on topics related to the peripheral activities of South Dakota schools.

Implications for Further Study

Several opportunities for further research seem available. Among them are:

- (1) A survey of the opinion of the general public regarding educational news.

(2) A survey of communities whose schools have designated public relations persons, comparing attitudes to schools and school news with other communities.

(3) A content analysis of educational news in the state's daily and weekly newspapers to reveal an upward or downward trend among various topics.

(4) The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act may have produced some significant changes in parents' preferences for certain types of educational news and information.

(5) What are the reasons for the abundance of high-school sports coverage in newspapers? Does this vary between rural and urban areas?

(6) What effect could the current controversy on sex education have on topical coverage and attitudes toward school news?

(7) What are the characteristics of a superintendent who is a "good" news communicator as compared with one who is a "poor" news communicator?

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS AND PTA PRESIDENTS

1. Following are several ways in which schools can make information and news available to parents. Please rate them according to your preference. Use the numbers from 1 to 7, with 1 denoting "most preferred", and 7 denoting "least preferred".

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| () local newspaper | () conferences with teachers |
| () PTA meetings | () notices sent home with student |
| () television | () school brochures or pamphlets |
| () radio | |

2. Following is a list of 13 kinds of school information and news. Mark those you find most interesting with a plus (+); mark those you find of average interest with a dash (-); mark those you find of least interest with a zero (0).

- () extra-curricular activities
- () courses of study
- () board of education and administration
- () health of pupils
- () discipline and behavior of students
- () methods of instruction
- () attendance
- () pupil progress and achievement
- () buildings and building program
- () parent-teacher association
- () teachers and school officers
- () value of education
- () school finance, business management

3. In comparison to other kinds of information and news (sports, state events, national news, weather, etc.), how interesting do you find educational news in general? Circle the appropriate response:

- (a) more interesting, (b) less interesting, (c) about average, (d) no opinion

4. In terms of being clear in meaning, school news and information is: (circle answer)

- (a) poor, (b) fair, (c) good, (d) very good, (e) excellent, (f) no opinion

5. Which of the following do you prefer? Circle only one.

- (a) school news and information which give only the positive side
- (b) school news and information which admits when success is not achieved in a school program or practice
- (c) no opinion

6. In general, which of the two categories in "5" above best fits the school information and news that you have received during the past year? (a), (b), or still (c)?
7. Have you ever been polled or consulted on a school problem before?
(a) yes, (b) no, (c) can't remember
8. Which one of the following types of school information and news do you feel to be most valuable to you as a parent? Circle correct response.
(a) sports, activities, extra-curricular
(b) teaching, learning, pupil progress
(c) administration -- finances, taxes, personnel
(d) no opinion, or another type not here
9. Many schools across the state are introducing innovations such as team teaching, independent study, individualized instruction, and modular scheduling. Have your sources of school news and information provided you with adequate information on these topics?
(a) always, (b) usually, (c) sometimes, (d) rarely, (e) never,
(f) no opinion
10. In general, is the quantity of school news and information adequate?
(a) always, (b) usually, (c) sometimes, (d) rarely, (e) never, (f) no ^{opinion}
11. Have you ever requested school officials to provide specific kinds of school information, or more school information?
(a) yes, (b) no, (c) can't remember

To assist with interpreting this information, please answer the following general background questions:

1. Person answering questionnaire: mother, father, other person ()
2. Grade levels in which you have children: college, 11-12, 9-10, 7-9, 4-6, K-3
3. Occupation of family head: business-related, agriculture-related, professional, government-related, other ()
4. Are you a home or land owner? yes no
5. Approximate family income: below \$8,000, \$8,000 to \$12,000, above \$12,000
6. Has your son or daughter ever had a school difficulty in any of these areas? social, academic, health or physical, other ()
7. If you wish to make any additional comment or criticism, they will be most welcome. Use the remaining space or the back of this sheet.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

1. Following is a list of 13 kinds of school news and information. In terms of THEIR INTEREST TO PARENTS, please rate them with the following symbols:

- (+) to denote OF HIGH INTEREST to parents
- (-) to denote OF AVERAGE INTEREST to parents
- (0) to denote OF LEAST INTEREST to parents

- () extra-curricular activities, sports
- () courses of study
- () board of education, administration
- () health of students
- () discipline and behavior of students
- () methods of instruction
- () attendance
- () pupil progress and achievement
- () buildings and building program
- () parent-teacher association
- () teachers and school officers
- () value of education
- () school finance, business management

2. Following are several ways in which schools can make information and news available to parents. Please rate them according to your preference, from 1 to 7, using "1" to denote MOST PREFERRED, and "7" to denote LEAST PREFERRED.

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| () local newspaper | () parent-teacher conferences |
| () PTA meetings | () notices sent home with student |
| () television | () school brochures or pamphlets |
| () radio | |

3. In terms of being CLEAR IN MEANING, school news and information is usually:

- (a) poor, (b) fair, (c) good, (d) very good, (e) excellent, (f) no opinion

4. Which do you prefer? Circle only one response.

- (a) school news and information which gives only the positive side
- (b) that which admits when success has not been achieved in a program or practice
- (c) no opinion

5. In general, which of the two categories in "4" best describes your school information and news for the past year? (a), (b), or still (c)?

6. Have you ever been polled or consulted on the communications facet of school administration before? (a) yes, (b) no, (c) do not recall

7. Which of the following types of school information and news do you feel to be most valuable to a parent? Circle best answer.

- (a) administration - finance, taxes, personnel, etc.
- (b) teaching, learning, pupil progress
- (c) student activities, sports
- (d) no opinion

8. How closely do the educational information and news interests of parents correlate to those of the general public? Circle best response.

- (a) close, (b) fairly close, (c) different, (d) very different,
- (e) no opinion

9. What is your view on the relationship and rapport between the schools and the press in general? Circle the number which best represents your estimation.

-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----
Type relationship: (excellent) (very good) (good) (strained) (hostile)

-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----
"Backing" for education: (excellent) (very good) (good) (poor) (absent)

10. Do you regularly supply photographs to accompany your press release?
(a) yes, (b) no

11. Do newspapermen seek out your school news on their own initiative?
Circle response.

- (a) almost always, (b) often, (c) sometimes, (d) seldom, (e) never

12. Do parents call on you to provide certain types of school news and information, or more school news and information? Circle appropriate response.

- (a) never, (b) seldom, (c) sometimes, (d) frequently, (e) continually

13. Approximately what per cent of news and information you submit to weekly newspapers is not printed, or is drastically shortened by editing?
Per cent of loss is: _____

14. In general, what amount of demand among parents for information and news on school innovations such as team teaching, modular scheduling, self-pacing, etc? Circle response.

- (a) no demand, (b) slight, (c) moderate, (d) fairly heavy, (e) heavy

15. In your school and community, approximately what per cent of the responsibility for reporting school news and information falls to each of the following:

___% yourself and other administrators; ___% staff; ___% students;
 ___% local newspaper; ___% other: ()

16. In an ideal situation, what should the percentages in "15" be?
 (a) same? or

___% yourself and other administrators; ___% staff; ___% students;
 ___% local newspaper; ___% other: ()

17. Do you regularly evaluate your communication efforts? Circle below methods you use:

(a) surveys and polls, (b) unsolicited feedback - letters, calls, conversations, (c) interviews with selected persons, (d) "tight" research design for evaluation, (e) other: (), (f) communications effort not evaluated.

18. Please estimate the amount of use to which you put each of the following methods of informing parents and the public. Use numbers from "1" to "9", with "1" denoting that which is used most, and "9" denoting that which is used least.

() radio	() student newspaper
() television	() notices sent home with students
() local newspaper	() meetings (civic, PTA, et. al.)
() brochures, pamphlets	() letters
() other: ()	

19. Which kind of communication receives the most use? Circle appropriate response.

(a) "futures" -- school information or news about coming events,
 (b) school information or news about events that have just occurred, or
 (c) about the same use of each type of communication.

20. What is your own background in school public relations and communications?

	undergraduate hours	graduate hours
School PR - - - - -	() - - - - -	() - - - - -
Journalism - - - - -	() - - - - -	() - - - - -
PR workshops - - - - -	() - - - - -	() - - - - -

Other background:

21. Check any of the following that you would especially recommend to assist school administrators in their school-to-home or public information programs. You may use a plus (+) to indicate a great need, a dash (-) to indicate a moderate need, and a zero (0) to indicate no need.

- () conferences or workshops in school public relations and communications
- () qualified school staff to specialize in this function
- () research and polling to evaluate and assess communications needs
- () consultants to visit school and give direct assistance
- () graduate courses in public information procedures
- () other:
- () other:
- () other:

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NEWSPAPER EDITORS

1. Approximately what per cent of your school news is written and submitted from each of the following sources:

_____ % from yourself or staff	Would you advocate any changes in the percentages?	_____ % from yourself or staff
_____ % from school personnel		_____ % from school personnel
_____ % from students		_____ % from students
_____ % from other: ()		_____ % from other: ()
--100% total		

2. Following is a list of 13 kinds of school news. IN TERMS OF THEIR INTEREST TO PARENTS AMONG YOUR READERS, please rate them with the following symbols:

(+) to denote OF HIGH INTEREST to parents
 (-) to denote OF AVERAGE APPEAL to parents
 (0) to denote OF LEAST INTEREST to parents

() extra-curricular activities
 () courses of study
 () board of education and administration
 () health of students
 () discipline and behavior of students
 () methods of instruction
 () attendance
 () pupil progress and achievement
 () buildings and building program
 () parent-teacher association
 () teachers and school officers
 () value of education
 () school finance, business management

3. How closely do the educational news interests of parents correlate to those of your general, average reader? Circle the appropriate letter.

(a) close, (b) fairly close, (c) different, (d) very different, (e) no opinion

4. How do you rate the school as a source of news in comparison with other news sources you have? Circle the appropriate letter.

(a) poor, (b) fair, (c) good, (d) very good, (e) excellent, (f) no opinion

5. Have parents ever expressed their concern to you for certain types of school coverage?

(a) frequently, (b) moderately, (c) infrequently, (d) rarely, (e) never

6. Have your sources of news on school innovations (i.e. team teaching, modular scheduling, individualized instruction, independent study, etc.) been adequate to meet the reading interests of parents? Circle the appropriate letter.

(a) yes, (b) no, (c) no demand for it, (d) no opinion

7. Rate the following faults as they apply to news submitted by educators. Rate them with the following symbols:

(+) to denote a GREAT FAULT

(-) to denote a MINOR FAULT

(0) to denote a fault RARELY FOUND in news from educators

- () frequently submitted past or very near to newspaper deadline
- () poor style ... doesn't follow inverted pyramid, etc.
- () difficult language ... "Educationalese" ... lengthy sentences
- () has little impact on the reader
- () biased and does not present a true picture
- () not localized
- () poor leads
- () does not meet the interests of general readers
- () is on only the "safe" and non-controversial topics
- () not timely
- () too lengthy to fit available space
- () seldom accompanied by a suitable photograph
- () does not meet the interests of parent readers
- () requires too much editing
- () too much emphasis on: (list topic) _____
- () not enough emphasis on: (list topic) _____
- () other fault: _____
- () other fault: _____
- () other fault: _____

8. Approximately what per cent of submitted educational news do you print? _____%

9. Approximately what per cent of your total news space is devoted to educational coverage during the school year? _____%

10. In your opinion, is the amount you listed in 9 (above) (a) adequate, (b) too much, or (c) not enough? Circle appropriate letter.

11. Does the school encourage the reporting of educational news? Circle appropriate letter.

(a) frequently, (b) moderately, (c) infrequently, (d) never

Kindly supply the following information to assist in categorizing and interpreting responses to this form.

Position of person completing form (if other than editor): _____

Approximate circulation of newspaper: _____

Does newspaper regularly feature a school page or departmental? (a) yes, (b) no

Any further comment or criticism you wish to make will be welcomed. Use remaining space or the back of this sheet.

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCHOOL NEWSPAPER ADVISERS

1. Following is a list of 13 kinds of school information and news. IN TERMS OF THEIR INTEREST TO PARENTS, please rate them with the following symbols:

- (+) to denote OF HIGH INTEREST to parents
- (-) to denote OF AVERAGE APPEAL to parents
- (0) to denote OF LEAST INTEREST to parents

- () extra-curricular activities, sports
- () courses of study
- () board of education and administration
- () health of students
- () discipline and behavior of students
- () methods of instruction
- () attendance
- () pupil progress and achievement
- () buildings and building program
- () parent-teacher association
- () value of education
- () school finance, business management
- () teachers and school officers

2. Following are several ways in which schools can make information and news available to parents. Please rate them according to your preference, from 1 to 7, using "1" to denote MOST PREFERRED, and "7" to denote LEAST PREFERRED.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| () local newspaper | () parent-teacher conferences |
| () PTA meetings | () notices sent home with students |
| () television | () school brochures or pamphlets |
| () radio | |

3. In terms of being CLEAR IN MEANING, school news and information is usually: (circle the appropriate letter)

- (a) poor, (b) fair, (c) good, (d) very good, (e) excellent, (f) no opinion

4. Which do you prefer? Circle appropriate letter.

- (a) school news and information which gives only the positive side
- (b) that which admits when success has not been achieved in a program or practice
- (c) no opinion

5. In general, which of the two categories in "4" best describes the information your school sent to parents and the general public during the past school year? (a), (b), or (c)?

6. Have you ever been polled or consulted on school-to-home communications before?

(a) yes, (b) no, (c) don't recall

7. Which of the following types of school information and news do you feel to be most valuable to a parent? Circle best answer.

(a) administration - finance, taxes, personnel, etc.

(b) teaching, learning, pupil progress

(c) student activities, sports

(d) no opinion

8. How closely do the educational information and news interests of parents correlate to those of the general public? Circle best response.

(a) close, (b) fairly close, (c) different, (d) very different, (e) no opinion

9. What is your view on the relationship and rapport between the schools and the press in general? Circle the number which best represents your estimate.

Type relationship: -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5
(excellent) (very good) (good) (strained) (hostile)

"Backing" for education: --1-----2-----3-----4-----5
(excellent) (very good) (good) (poor) (absent)

10. Do parents call on you to provide certain types of school news and information, or more school news and information? Circle appropriate response.

(a) never, (b) seldom, (c) sometimes, (d) frequently, (e) continually

11. Approximately what per cent of news and information you submit to weekly newspapers is not printed, or is drastically shortened by editing? Per cent of loss is _____%

12. In general, what amount of demand among parents for information and news on school innovations such as team teaching, modular scheduling, self-pacing, etc.? Circle response.

(a) no demand, (b) slight, (c) moderate, (d) fairly heavy, (e) heavy

13. In your school, which kind of communication receives the most use?
Circle response.

(a) "futures" -- school information or news about coming events,
(b) school information or news about events that have just occurred, or
(c) about the same use of each type of communication.

14. What is your own background in school public relations and communications?

undergraduate hours (sem.) graduate hours (sem.)

School PR -----() -----()

Journalism --- -----() -----()

Related workshops -----() -----()

or number:

Other background:

15. Check any of the following that you would especially recommend to assist schools in their parent/public information programs. You may use a (+) to indicate a great need, a dash (-) to indicate a moderate need, and a zero (0) to indicate no need.

() conferences or workshops in school PR and communications; ()
qualified school staff to specialize in this function; () research and
polling to evaluate and assess needs; () consultants to give direct
assistance; () graduate courses in public information procedures; ()
other: ; () other: () other:
; () other: *

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